



*East Malaysia*  
**PULAU SIPADAN**  
 SABAH

PULAU MABUL

PULAU KAPALAI



**Pulau Sipadan**

Lying just off the northeast coast of Borneo is Sipadan, Malaysia's only oceanic island. Shaped by volcanic activity aeons ago, this 35 acre island rises about 700 metres from the sea floor, attracting diverse marine life from the blackness of the open sea.

The spectacular diving, unrivalled anywhere else in the country, has made Malaysia one of the top diving destinations. Encounters with turtles, resident schools of jacks and barracudas are almost assured around the tiny coral island. A popular feature of this island is the precipitous reef wall





Just a mere 8 metres from the dive station of the 'Sipadan Dive Lodge' the wall plunges to about 680 metres. Many divers have remarked that staying and diving on the island is similar to doing so from a live-aboard ship. You enjoy the ease of multiple shore and boat dives, with up to 5 dives per day.

Sipadan Island, formerly declared a bird sanctuary, is also home to monitor lizards, fruit bats, the unique coconut crabs, and a luxuriant rainforest. About 47 known species of birds frolic and



Blue lined snapper (*Lutjanus kasmira*) are difficult to approach and would swim away when a diver approaches.

### Barracuda Point

The dive usually begins with the reef on your right, as you descend to the reef top at about 6 to 8 metres, you will be greeted by schools of fusiliers and bumphead

barrel sponges, black coral trees, sea whips and soft corals. Huge black marble stingrays, schools of surgeonfish, large tunas, manta rays and clouds of pyramid butterflyfish greet

animals like the leaf-fish, frogfish, blennies, mantis shrimps and numerous nudibranchs.

### Hanging Gardens

As the name suggests, this pretty dive site has a profusion of colourful soft corals; some shaped like cauliflower plants and even grape-like shapes growing from underhangs along the wall. The reef top begins at about 6 metres and plunges steeply to the depths. Here, you will encounter colourful crowd of reef fish such as butterfly fish, angelfish,



As the sun sets, divers can unwind and exchange diving stories off the jetty on Pulau Sipadan.

feed about the natural vegetation, providing yet another attraction for the visitor.

wrasses congregating at the reef top. Growth of coral life extends to depths between 30 to 40 metres with huge

the divers along the wall. Currents that sweep the valley section of the site attracts school of batfish, white tip sharks resting at the sandy bottom, barracudas, jacks, turtles, hammerhead sharks, grey reef sharks (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) and or even the leopard shark (*Stegostoma fasciatum*) at the valley pass. As you ascend from the 18 metres-depth of the valley to the gentle slopes at the side you can observe garden eels, triggerfish and even exceptional macro marine

squirrelfish, boxfish and lots of nudibranchs. Friendly sweetlips and groupers will curiously check out divers, great for underwater photography. Small ledges encountered usually have small shrimps wedged between bubble coral, fire tail gobies darting about their burrows and the occasional lobster peering out between crevices. As the site is located on the western part of the island, dives should be in the afternoon, with better sunlight penetration. The



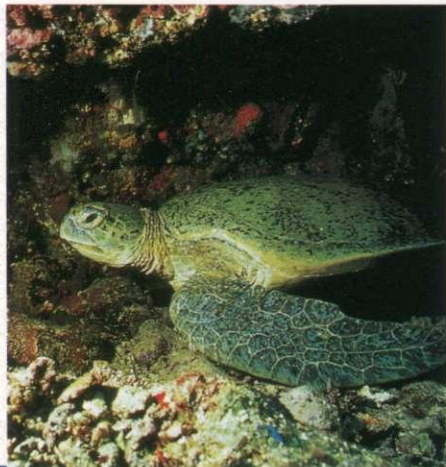
Pulau Sipadan is one of the few islands in Malaysia where a photo processing facility is available for developing film.



Huge manta rays (*Manta birostris*) are easily recognised by the large pectoral fins that can attain up to six metres in width.



Pulau Sipadan is a haven for sighting several species of turtles such as Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*).



of the island and similar to Barracuda Point as currents sweeps across the reef. Depending on the currents, it is best to start your dive with the reef on your left. The reef topography follows a gentle slope from about 7 to 55 metres at the sandy bottom shelf.

soft corals come alive and extend their body size by almost three times when currents sweep the reef. Providing a breathtaking you.

### South Point

The furthest dive site from the island jetty is a 10 minutes ride in a dive boat. South Point, as the name suggests, is located at the southern tip

Here, chances are usually good to sight big animals like manta rays, leopard sharks, Napoleon wrasses, groupers and a kaleidoscope of smaller reef fish. Assuming you are diving with the wall on your left, you will come accross sea fans and sea whip corals at 25 metres depth. You might also encounter a school of jacks prior to a cloud of dark

mass approaching - this is the largest school of barracudas to be seen anywhere. The school usually swims against the current, and if approached cautiously, will permit divers to swim alongside. Further along the sloping wall at about 25 metres is a ledge with coral rubble, where white tip sharks and leopard sharks rest on the bottom. If you dive this spot often and at the right time, you may chance upon observing the mating ritual of white tip sharks.

### Turtle Cavern

Much has been written about the turtle cavern, referring it to as a Turtle Graveyard. In reality the turtles enter the cavern accidentally to rest but get lost in the labyrinth of the tunnels, then become disorientated and drown.

The cavern is situated at the northern end of the island right below several huts. Divers are often warned during their first orientation dive that they are not allowed to enter the cavern for their own safety. A signboard is also erected at the entrance of the Turtle Cavern providing further warning, so a curious diver won't end his stay in the cavern. However, visits into the cavern can be arranged with a qualified divemaster leading 3 divers at a time. A cave diving certification is offered for the adventurous who wish to explore the labyrinths.

The dive begins along the

wall of the drop-off and descends to about 20 metres. Depth in the cavern is about 21 metres, and you find the various connecting caverns rise to less than 4 metres from the surface. You will notice skeletal remains of perished turtles scattered randomly on the silty cavern floor. There is even the remains of what was once an egg-carrying female turtle. No coral growth is observed in the

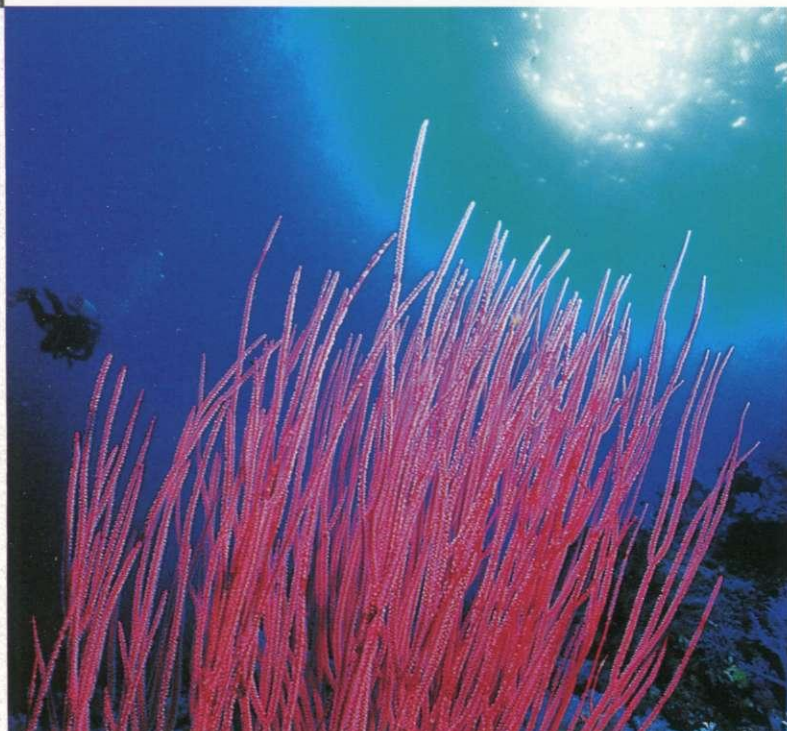


Trevally (*Caranx sexfasciatus*) live in schools along the reef and provides excitement for divers when encountered.

cavern. The only life forms are schools of silver sweepers, soldier fish and the flashlight fish.

### Getting There

Pulau Sipadan is reached by flight from Sabah's capital, Kota Kinabalu, then a connecting flight to Tawau, followed by a 2 1/2 hour drive to Semporna and finally a 1 hour fast catamaran boat transfer to the island. To avoid disappointment, prior bookings must be made.



Sea whips (*Ellisella andamanensis*) grow along reef slopes and steep reef walls.





The reef of Pulau Sipadan plunges to about 700 metres deep.



Pelagic fish like this white tip shark forage for food on the reef top.

Coral life of Pulau Sipadan flourish in the nutrient rich currents.

